

Message

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Sent: 1/23/2020 8:28:46 PM
To: Gettle, Jeaneanne [Gettle.Jeaneanne@epa.gov]
Subject: FW: Protest ahead of EPA fish farm hearing in Sarasota

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Sent: Thursday, January 23, 2020 3:12 PM
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Cc: Burks, Felicia <Burks.Felicia@epa.gov>
Subject: Protest ahead of EPA fish farm hearing in Sarasota

FYI

https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20200123/protest-ahead-of-epa-fish-farm-hearing-in-sarasota?fbclid=IwAR1z5o2mLsu1LP2w6osxxP2QxBoCOEKr_ChsrxssuJNymrOuV_PWDDwepM

Felicia Burks

Environmental groups have already raised objections to the proposal, and plan to demonstrate in Sarasota before Kampachi Farm permit hearing

SARASOTA — Environmental groups objecting to a Hawaii-based company's plans to open the first offshore fish farm in the Gulf of Mexico about 45 miles west of Sarasota plan to demonstrate against the proposal before a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency permit hearing on Tuesday.

"Lots of people don't know that this is happening in their backyard; it's flying under their radar," said Hallie Templeton, senior oceans campaigner at Friends of the Earth, one of several organizers of the Tuesday demonstration outside at Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium, where the hearing will be held.

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[Kampachi Farms](#) plans to anchor a chain-link mesh pen offshore of Southwest Florida to raise 20,000 almaco jack fish for human consumption. The fish farm is a pilot project and would not only be the first for the Gulf but also the first in federal waters in the continental United States. If it works, more are expected to follow, both here and elsewhere.

The Kampachi proposal is drawing opposition from environmental groups because they don't want offshore fish farms to start popping up around the country that could potentially pose a threat to clean water and the fishing industry.

Although a project this size would be unlikely to contribute to harmful algal blooms such as red tide, Justin Bloom, the founder and president of Suncoast Waterkeeper, said the cumulative impact of additional offshore aquaculture farms could either initiate or fuel an existing bloom.

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Bloom urged the EPA "to proceed with great caution" and called on the agency to consider additional studies and surveys for the "most appropriate location" in the Gulf of Mexico.

The EPA's analysis says it won't have a detrimental environmental impact.

"That's a folly," Templeton said. "It's completely overlooking the long list of environmental concerns in other countries."

The organizations Friends of the Earth, the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance and the Recirculating Farms Coalition are joining forces to discourage the EPA from granting the permit. They contend chemicals flowing out of the pen could disrupt and pollute the natural ecosystem.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in December urged the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to shift from net-pen fish farming in British Columbia to land-based, closed-containment systems by 2025.

Denmark made a similar move in August.

The Kampachi project was one of two potential Gulf fish farm projects discussed at a June 27 workshop on the future of aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico.

The other is being proposed by Manna Fish Farms of Hampton Bays, New York, and was presented by Kelly Lucas of the Thad Cochran Marine Aquaculture Center at the University of Southern Mississippi at the workshop. That could be located off of Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle.

The purpose of operations like these is to create a sustainable source of seafood.

However, offshore fish farming has also seen some push back from some in the fishing industry who believe aquaculture creates an unfair advantage to local fishermen.

"The vast majority of fishermen in our network are totally against this development," said Rosanna Marie Neil, policy council for Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, noting similar concerns about risks to the environment. "These private companies are also selling farmed fish at artificial prices that don't account for the true cost of harvesting those fish."

Should the EPA greenlight the project, Kampachi Farms must also get permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because of the need to anchor in federal waters.

In addition to Florida Sea Grant, Sarasota's Mote Marine Laboratory is a stakeholder in the project. Mote will provide fingerling almaco jack spawned and raised at its land-based Mote Aquaculture Research Park for the Kampachi demonstration project.

The net pen would be 17 meters in diameter and 7 meters deep, and located 40 meters below the surface.

It would be anchored to the bottom and tended by a feed barge that would be tethered to the side of the net pen.

The fish would grow to market size within 12 months.

"We're hoping to raise awareness, educate and send a message to the EPA," Templeton said. "We're going to show that there is a community opposition and it will not go untested and that people care about what's happening on their coastline."

Demonstration organizers include the Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth, Healthy Gulf, Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, Sierra Club, Suncoast Waterkeeper and others.

The demonstration is from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the corner of Ken Thompson and John Ringling Parkways and along the sidewalk. The hearing begins at 5:30 p.m. at the Wave Center, Mote's main laboratory building at 1600 Ken Thompson Parkway.

The original comment period, which ended in September, was extended until Feb. 4 after Friends of the Earth, the Center for Food Safety, Center for Biological Diversity and others sent a joint letter requesting the hearing be extended. That also triggered the public permit hearing.

HOW TO COMMENT: You may comment on the proposed action in writing, using email, FAX or mail before Feb. 4. Submit comments to:

Email: Meghan Wahlstrom (wahlstrom-ramler.meghan@epa.gov)

Fax: 404-562-9772

Mail: US EPA – WD/PGB ATTN: Meghan Wahlstrom 61 Forsyth Street SW Atlanta, GA 30303

To comment at the meeting, you must first register at projects.erg.com/conferences/npdes/register-publichearing.html.